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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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R 152030Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3472
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, BL
SUBJ: INCREASING BOLIVIAN FEARS ABOUT WAR BETWEEN CHILE
AND PERU

1. RECENT EMBASSY CONVERSATIONS WITH PRIVATE AND PUBLIC BOLIVIANS REFLECT GROWING APPREHENSION OVER WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE THE LIKELIHOOD OF WAR BETWEEN CHILE AND PERU. A BOLIVIAN ARMY GENERAL TOLD POL/ECON OFFICER FLATLY THAT THERE WOULD BE WAR WITHIN TWO YEARS. THIS KIND OF THINKING HAS SPREAD REPIDLY TO THE EXTENT THAT WAR IS BECOMING A COMMON TOPIC AT PRIVATE GATHERINGS.

2. THE PRESS HAS ALSO PICKED UP THE THEME. THE GOVERNMEN OWNED DAILY, HOW, IN AN EDITORIAL DECEMBER 14, REPORTS THE EXODUS TO BOLIVIA OF 50 PEOPLE PER WEEK FROM THE CHILEAN TOWN OF ARICA OUT OF FEAR OF BEING CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ARICA-TACNA BATTLE ZONE. ACCORDING TO THE EDITORIAL THOSE REMAINIG IN THE ARE CONTINUE LIVING IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF TENSION AS CHILE AND PERU GEAR UP LAND, AIR, AND NAVAL FORCES WITH COSTLY ARMS PURCHASES. THE DAILY EL DIARIO (DECEMBER 11, 1976) IN A MORE CREATIVE STYLE CITES THE CHILEAN WEEKLY QUE PASA ABOUT THE DESIRE OF EVERY ARICAN TO BE FREE OF THE THREAT OF WAR AND THE QUOTE GALLOP OF THE APOCALYPTIC HORSE UNQUOTE. THE HOY EDITORIAL GOES ON TO CALL FOR ARBITRATION
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OF THE PROBLEMS BETWEEN CHILE AND PERU AS PROVIDED FOR BY

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ARTICLE 12 OF THE 1929 TREATY; QUOTE THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WILL RESOLVE ANY CONTROVERSY UNQUOTE.

3. WHETHER WELL-FOUNDED OR NOT, GROWING PUBLIC CONCERN OF A PERU-CHILE WAR SERVES TO STRENGTHEN THE BOLIVIAN MILITARY'S EFFORTS TO INCREASE WEAPONS SPENDING, DESPITE PRESIDENT BANZER'S DESIRE TO PRESERVE BOLIVIA'S AVAILABLE RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT PURPOSES. THE SUBJECT HAS BEEN FURTHER HEATED BY A FRONT PAGE ARTICLE IN EL DIARIO DECEMBER 15 QUOTING ARMY CONNAMDER RAUL ALVAREZ AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE TARAPACA REGIMENT AS STATING THAT BOLIVIA INTENDS TO ACQUIRE ARMS AND MUNITIONS, INCLUDING 1500 MOTORIZED UNITS, FROM BRAZIL. ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE ALVAREZ SAID HE HAD JUST RETURNED FROM A VISIT TO BRAZIL AT THE INVITATION OF THE BRAZILIAN ARMY AND THAT THE MOTORIZED UNITS WOULD BE OBTAINED FROM THE INGESA FACTORY. ALVAREZ ADDED THAT BOLIVIA IS NOT TRYING TO SPARK A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN CHILE AND PERU AND STRESSED BOLIVIA'S PACIFIST POLICY, ALTHOUGH HE SAID THAT THE COUNTRY'S ONLY OBJECTIV IS DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE WORLD THROUGH AN OUTLET TO THE SEA. NEITHER THE HOY NOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OWNED DAILY PRESENCIA CARRIED SUCH COMMENTS AND WE UNDERSTAND THAT ALVAREZ IS MEETING WITH THE PRESS DECEMBER 16 TO DENY HE MADE ANY SUCH COMMENTS AND TO CALL FOR A RETRACTION BY EL DIARIO. DAO SOURCES INDICATE THE PRESS CONFERENCE WILL BE AT 10:00 AM TODAY DEC 15.

4. EMBASSY COMMENT. THE WAR FEARS STEM FROM DEEP BOLIVIAN DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE PERU-CHILE IMPASSE ON OUTLET TO THE SEA NEGOTIATIONS (AND BOLIVIANS HELPLESS FEELING ABOUT THEIR ABILITY TO AFFECT THE OUTCOME) AND CONCERN ABOUT RECENT PERUVIAN AND CHILEAN ARMS PURCHASES. MOSTLY BOLIVIANS BELIEVE THEIR COUNTRY'S SOVEREIGNTY WOULD BE VIOLATED IN THE EVENT OF WAR AND THEY WONDER WHAT, IF ANYTHING, THEY CAN DO ABOUT IT. END COMMENT.
STEDMAN

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